

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 113 779

CS 501 153

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TITLE A Survey Investigation of Trends and Issues in Speech Communication Ph.D. Programs.  
PUB DATE 75  
NOTE 11p.; Survey prepared at the University of Texas  
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.76 HC-\$1.58 Plus Postage  
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); \*Doctoral Programs; \*Employment Patterns; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; Job Market; \*School Surveys; \*Speech Instruction; \*Trend Analysis

## ABSTRACT

Prepared to determine the attitudes and beliefs of department chairpersons in speech communication about the future areas of academic concentration, this survey collected information on the kinds of nonacademic employment which Ph.D. graduates in speech communication obtained over the past two years. The investigators used the 1973-74 Speech Communication Association "Directory of Graduate Programs" to identify departments awarding the Ph.D. degree in speech communication. A fifteen-item, two-page questionnaire accompanied by a cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope were mailed to each of the chairpersons of 47 departments. Thirty-six questionnaires were returned, yielding a return rate of 77 percent. It is concluded that the strongest asset for job placement is versatility, the ability through academic training and experience to work in a variety of settings or to teach in a variety of academic areas. Furthermore, those graduates who will most likely obtain academic positions will possess demonstrated teaching competence as well as proven research ability. (The results of the survey are presented in both narrative and table format, including data on nonacademic employment.) (RB)

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# A SURVEY INVESTIGATION OF TRENDS AND ISSUES IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION Ph.D. PROGRAMS

Ronald E. Basset and Robert C. Jeffrey

For at least the last five years, chairpersons of departments of speech communication offering the Ph.D. degree have expressed serious concern about the future placement of Ph.D. graduates in positions related to their training. This concern was generated by an observed increased difficulty with Ph.D. placement, combined with reports from several legitimate sources about a "Ph.D. glut." The alarm was not unfounded. Malcolm G. Scully reports that between now and 1985, 48,000 Ph.D.'s will be needed annually to meet the demand for college teachers, while the U. S. Office of Education predicts that about 48,600 Ph.D.'s will be produced each year.<sup>1</sup>

The Speech Communication Association Placement Service convention listings between 1967 and 1973 verify the reduction in the number of college teaching jobs for Ph.D.'s in speech communication. At the Los Angeles SCA convention in 1967, 218 positions were listed for Ph.D.'s in the combined areas of communication theory, oral interpretation, rhetoric and public address, debate, fundamentals and speech education.<sup>2</sup> By 1970, 149 positions were listed in the same areas at the New Orleans convention,<sup>3</sup> and in 1973, 77 positions were listed at the New York convention.<sup>4</sup>

Since college teaching positions have constituted the primary market for Ph.D. graduates in speech communication, and since it is obvious that this traditional market has become restricted in the past eight years, it is clear that other markets must be located for a number of the new Ph.D. degree holders. The continued success of doctoral programs in speech communication is dependent in part upon the ability of graduates to obtain positions that permit them to utilize their professional preparation. Conversely, programs that prepare people to teach and conduct research in areas for which there is little demand may find it difficult to attract students and consequently justify their continued existence.

The speech communication profession is not alone in facing the need to search for non-traditional job opportunities. Philip Boffey recently reported that by 1985, "more than one-fifth of the doctoral level scientists and engineers might be engaged in activities unrelated to science or engineering, compared to fewer than one-tenth in 1972."<sup>5</sup> He further projects the need for the development of nontraditional job opportunities for scientists and engineers, suggesting that this shift will have major educational implications for institutions as well as for students.

It was with this information in mind that the authors prepared a survey to submit to chairpersons of departments offering the Ph.D. degree in speech communication to determine their attitudes and beliefs about the future areas of academic concentration in their departments. An additional purpose of the investigation was to collect information on the kinds of nonacademic employment Ph.D. graduates in speech communication obtained over the past two years with the aim of offering some direction to department administrators concerned with future Ph.D. graduate placement.

## PROCEDURE

The investigators used the 1973-74 SCA *Directory of Graduate Programs* to identify departments awarding the Ph.D. degree in speech communication. Departments offering doctoral work primarily or exclusively in speech pathology and/or theatre were excluded, leaving a total of 47 departments which were included in the survey. A 15-item, 2-page questionnaire accompanied by a cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope was mailed to each of the chairpersons of the 47 departments. The initial mailing was posted on February 5, 1975. A second mailing to non-respondents was sent on March 11, 1975. Thirty-six questionnaires were returned, yielding a return rate of 77%. Two were not usable because the respondents indicated their departments did not offer the Ph.D. degree. Another was excluded from the data analysis because the doctoral program was devoted almost exclusively to speech pathology and audiology.

## RESULTS

To obtain predictions about future job market conditions, the first survey item asked respondents to rank selected areas of speech communication on the basis of anticipated demand by employers (academic and nonacademic) in 1980. Eight of the ten areas of concentration listed were selected because they appeared frequently in the Speech Communication Association Placement Service Bulletin position descriptions as well as in announcements of positions by individual institutions. The ninth and tenth additions, political communication and intercultural communication, were included because the investigators believed they were important emerging areas. Respondents assigned a rank to each area, with rank number 1 indicating the area predicted to be most in demand, and rank number 10 indicating the area predicted to be least in demand. Thirty-two respondents provided usable replies to this item. The average rank for each of the ten areas is shown in Table I. This item also permitted respondents to write-in and rank two additional areas of their choosing. The area of "broadcasting" was reported twice with an average rank of 2. "Mass communication" was designated by four persons and given an average rank of 1.5. "Speech pathology" was added once and given a rank of 2. "Language acquisition and behavior" was selected by four respondents and given an average rank of 4.75. Finally, the area of "human relations" was specified by one respondent and given the rank of 1.

Realizing that some of the areas listed for ranking in item 1 are not mutually exclusive, the investigators have reservations about drawing conclusions based on the information provided. It appears, however, from the data displayed in Table I, that the trend over the last decade toward "communication"-oriented instruction and research, with a concurrent decreasing emphasis on such traditional areas as public address and oral interpretation will continue in 1980.

Item 2 each respondent was asked to estimate the percent of Ph.D. candidates in his department's program concentrating in each of the ten areas identified in item 1. This item was included to obtain information about the present status of doctoral programs in relation to the future job market trends forecast by replies to item 1. Table II shows the number of departments with the reported percent of Ph.D. candidates concentrating in the ten listed areas. Two survey participants did not answer this item, resulting in 31 usable replies.

Data in Table II may be of most interest when compared with data in Table I. While organizational communication was predicted to be the area most in demand in 1980, Table II reveals that eight departments had no candidates in the area at the time of the survey, with the majority (17) indicating between only 1 and 10% of their students concentrating in this area. If the predictions reported in Table I are accurate, then organization communication should experience significant gains in popularity. Although public address is predicted to be one of the areas least in demand by 1980, only seven departments reported no candidates in the area and five reported between 21 and 50% of their students had selected this specialization. Hence, it appears that public address is not diminishing in popularity at this time. While intercultural communication was ranked fourth in Table I, Table II reveals that 20 departments had no candidates in the area and the remaining 11 had only 1 to 10% in this concentration. These reports suggest that, like organizational communication, intercultural may experience significant growth in the near future.

Item 3A asked: "In your experience in placement of Ph.D. graduates in 1973-74, graduates in which of the areas listed in item 2 were most difficult to place?" Of the 33 responding, eleven (33%) identified the area of public address; five (15%) rhetoric; two (6%) interpretation of literature; two (6%) intercultural; two (6%) interpersonal and small group; one (3%) communication theory; six (18%) indicated no difficulty in placing any graduates; and four (12%) reported awarding no degrees during the 1973-74 year.

Item 3B asked: "Graduates in which of the areas listed in item 2 were least difficult to place?" Of the 33 responding, ten (30%) identified interpersonal and small group; three (9%) organizational communication; three (9%) communication theory; two (6%) forensics; two (6%) speech education; two (6%) broadcasting; one (3%) political communication; one (3%) interpretation of literature; one (3%) methodology; four (12%) found it impossible to specify a single area; and four (12%) reported they could not answer the questions because they had not awarded degrees in 1973-74.

Item 4A asked participants to report the number of Ph.D. graduates of their departments in the last two years who had been placed in nonacademic positions. Of the 29 chairpersons of departments awarding degrees in that time period, nine (31%) reported placing no graduates in nonacademic positions; seven (24%) reported placing one; five (17%) reported placing two; two (7%) placed three; two (7%) placed four; one (3%) placed five; one (3%) placed six; one (3%) placed eight; and one (3%) placed ten. Of the 20 departments that reported placing any graduates in nonacademic positions, such placement accounted on the average for only 11.5% of the total placement (Item 4B). This figure reveals that the field of speech communication is greatly dependent upon educational institutions to provide positions for

#### Ph.D. graduate employment.

Item 4C asked chairpersons whose departments placed Ph.D. graduates in nonacademic positions to identify the types of positions. The 33 job descriptors generated, with the number of times each was reported, are shown in Table III.

The data in Table III fail to reveal a pattern in the types of nonacademic employment obtained by speech communication Ph.D. graduates. Two somewhat competing explanations are suggested. First, the great diversity of positions suggest that doctoral programs do not prepare graduates for specific types of positions, and that several variables (e.g., "luck;" and "knowing the right person") other than professional preparation may have enabled graduates to obtain their positions. A second possible explanation is that graduates are able to satisfy the requirements of a great variety of nonacademic positions and that perhaps tradition, or personal inclination, has led the majority of graduates into academic roles. These two interpretations would seem to be worthy of further investigation.

Item 5A asked: "Has your department taken any action to limit or restrict the number of Ph.D. students in your program?" Sixteen respondents answered "yes," while 17 answered "no." Those giving affirmative answers were asked in item 5B to indicate the type of action(s) taken to limit enrollment. Seven institutions reported placing restrictions on the number of Ph.D. students enrolled; eight reported more selective entrance requirements; two reported that the size of the program had been reduced; one reported that stipends had been reduced.

Item 5C asked chairpersons who indicated their departments had not take action to limit or restrict enrollments if they intended to take such action in the immediate future. Two (12%) answered "yes;" twelve (70%) answered "no;" and three (18%) were uncertain.

These data reveal that approximately one-half of the departments responding are, or will be in the immediate future, awarding fewer Ph.D. degrees. Some departments may have voluntarily decided to reduce the number of degrees awarded to compensate for the declining number of academic positions recently available. Restricted enrollments in other departments may reflect financial cutbacks in their respective institutions. Whatever the motivations for reducing Ph.D. programs, some methods used to do so (e.g., more selective entrance requirements) seem to increase the probability that students obtaining degrees will be uniformly well qualified.

Item 6A asked: "Are you attempting to establish relationships with nonacademic institutions to facilitate placement of Ph.D. graduates?" Of the 32 respondents, 16 answered "yes," while 16 answered "no." In part B of the item, those answering affirmatively were asked to identify the types of institutions with which they were attempting to establish relationships. The 12 types of institutions identified and the number of times each was specified are shown in Table IV.

The 16 respondents to item 6A declaring attempts to establish relationships with nonacademic institutions to facilitate placement of Ph.D. graduates represent a commitment to educate students for nonacademic employment. They overwhelmingly consider business, industry and government as the most likely markets for the Ph.D. surplus, although other markets are being wooed. A follow-up study to determine the methods and effectiveness of methods for establishing the relationships would provide valuable information for all departments interested in the attainment of similar goals.

Item 7A asked: "Are the areas of specialization in your Ph.D. program stabilized or changing?" Of the 30 responses, 16 indicated "stabilized," and 14 indicated "changing."

Item 7B asked respondents who indicated their programs were changing to identify the areas to be added or to receive increased emphasis. The 10 areas identified and the number of times each was reported are shown in Table V.

Perhaps the most significant finding revealed in the responses to item 7B is that 8 of the 14 schools reporting changing Ph.D. programs listed organizational communication as an area to be added or to receive increased emphasis. The 10 areas identified and the number of times each was reported are shown in Table V.

Perhaps the most significant finding revealed in the responses to item 7B is that 8 of the 14 schools reporting changing Ph.D. programs listed organizational communication as an area to be added or to receive special emphasis. Organizational communication was the only area selected with high frequency by respondents. The remaining 9 areas are representative of a wide variety of academic specializations and defy a unifying classification.

Item 8 asked: "What were the most important attributes, characteristics or accomplishments possessed by your department's graduates who were placed in what you consider to be the best positions in the last two years?" The responses with the number of times each was reported are displayed in Table VI.

It is clear from the responses presented in Table VI that versatility, the ability through academic training and experience to work in a variety of settings or teach in a variety of academic areas, is believed to be the strongest asset for placement. Belief in the importance



of this attribute presumably results from the limited number of highly specialized teaching positions in institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, those graduates who will most likely obtain academic positions will possess demonstrated teaching competence as well as proven research ability.

#### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. It appears that the trend over the last decade toward "communication"-oriented instruction and research, with a concurrent decreasing emphasis on such traditional areas as public address and oral interpretation will continue into 1980.
2. While organizational communication was predicted to be the area most in demand in 1980, the information obtained reveals no substantial number of Ph.D. students concentrating in the area at present. In contrast, while public address is predicted to be one of the areas least in demand by 1980, the data obtained reveals that a substantial number of Ph.D. students are currently concentrating in this area.
3. Current experience indicates that Ph.D. graduates in the area of public address are the most difficult to place while those specializing in interpersonal and small group communication are the least difficult.
4. In the period 1972-74, placement of speech communication Ph.D. graduates in non-academic positions accounted for less than 12% of the positions obtained by the total number of Ph.D. graduates in this time period.
5. A consistent pattern in the types of nonacademic positions secured by Ph.D. graduates in speech communication was not revealed.
6. Approximately one-half of the departments responding are, or will be in the immediate future, awarding fewer Ph.D. degrees.
7. One-half of the chairpersons responding in the survey indicated their departments are attempting to establish relationships with nonacademic institutions to facilitate placement of Ph.D. graduates. Furthermore, they overwhelmingly consider business, industry and government as the most likely markets for the Ph.D. surplus.
8. Approximately one-half of the survey respondents indicated their departments' Ph.D. programs were undergoing change, with a substantial number reporting organizational communication as an area to be added or to receive additional emphasis.
9. While versatility, the ability through academic training and experience to work in a variety of settings or teach in a variety of academic areas, is believed to be the strongest asset for placement, proven teaching and research ability were frequently cited as critical competencies.

<sup>1</sup>Malcolm G. Scully, "A Glut of College Graduates?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, X (March 24, 1975), 1, 8.

<sup>2</sup>Robert N. Hall, "Facing Employment Problems," *Bulletin of the Association of Departments and Administrators in Speech Communication*, Issue #1 (October, 1972), 7-12.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Robert N. Hall, "The SCA Placement Service: 1973," *Bulletin of the Association of Departments and Administrators in Speech Communication*, Issue #7 (April, 1974), 12-18.

<sup>5</sup>Philip M. Boffey, "Ph.D. Surplus, 1985," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, X (April 28, 1975), 1, 11.

TABLE I

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION AND AVERAGE  
RANKS OF PREDICTED EMPLOYMENT DEMAND IN 1980

Area	Average Rank
Organizational Communication	3.12
Interpersonal and Small Group	3.13
Communication Theory	3.78
Intercultural Communication	5.88
Forensics	6.06
Rhetorical Theory	6.53
Political Communication	6.71
Speech Education	6.81
Public Address	7.56
Interpretation of Literature	8.32

TABLE II

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS WITH REPORTED PERCENT OF PH.D. CANDIDATES  
IN AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Area	Percent						
	0%	1-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%
Organizational Communication	8	17	4	2	0	0	0
Interpersonal & Small Group	6	5	5	9	3	3	0
Communication Theory	4	14	7	4	1	1	0
Intercultural Communication	20	11	0	0	0	0	0
Forensics	17	12	2	0	0	0	0
Rhetorical Theory	5	14	8	4	0	0	0
Political Communication	18	11	2	0	0	0	0
Speech Education	13	16	2	0	0	0	0
Public Address	7	13	6	3	1	1	0
Interpretation of Literature	16	7	3	2	1	1	1

TABLE III  
NONACADEMIC POSITIONS OBTAINED BY PH.D. GRADUATES

Position	Number of Schools Reporting
Consulting	7
Public Relations	5
Administration in Higher Education	3
Business and Industry (unspecified)	2
Industrial Relations	1
Sales Manager	1
Personnel	1
State Welfare Department	1
Administration in Foundations	1
Editor	1
U. S. Information Service	1
Actor (stage and screen)	1
Industrial Training	1
Minister	1
State Department of Public Education	1
Marketing/Advertising	1
Hospital Administration	1
Educational Testing	1
Boy Scout Administration in Africa	1
Public School Administration	1
Federal Agency Training Director	1
Administration (unspecified)	1
Stockbroker	1
Media	1
Computers	1
Health Administration	1
Director of Women's Programs, U. S. Postal Service	1
Hospital Association Program Evaluator	1
Legislative Assistant to U. S. Congressman	1
IBM Management Trainee	1
Director of Organization Development (Bank)	1
Vice President of Marketing and Resources (Bank)	1
Language Specialist (County Health Services)	1



TABLE IV

NONACADEMIC EMPLOYERS OF PH.D. GRADUATES WITH WHOM  
DEPARTMENTS ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS

Employer	Number of Schools Reporting
Business Organizations (Unspecified)	9
Industries (Unspecified)	8
Government Agencies	5
Service Organizations (e.g., Hospitals)	4
Banking Institutions	2
Automobile Industry	2
Public Agencies (e.g., Red Cross; Chamber of Commerce)	1
Broadcast Stations	1
Media	1
Public Utilities	1
Publishers	1
Public Television	1

TABLE V

## AREAS ADDED OR RECEIVING ADDITIONAL EMPHASIS IN PH.D. PROGRAMS

Area	Number of Schools Reporting
Organizational Communication	8
Information Systems	1
Nonverbal Communication	1
Language Acquisition	1
Intercultural Communication	1
Interdisciplinary Studies	1
Communication Theory	1
Mass Communication	1
Public Relations	1
Research Methods	1

TABLE VI

ATTRIBUTES, CHARACTERISTICS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF PH.D.  
GRADUATES PLACED IN BEST PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

Attributes, Characteristics and Accomplishments	Number of Schools Reporting
Versatility	10
Published Prior to Degree	8
Teaching Competence,	8
Intelligence	4
Research Competence	4
Research Sophistication	3
Personableness	3
Strong General Background	2
Theory Sophistication	2
Interest in Research and Teaching	1
Hardworking	1
Being Female	1
Strong Graduate School Record	1
Presented Convention Papers Prior to Degree	1
Strong Recommendations	1
Strong Related Minor	1